

PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES LACK A VOICE IN LOCAL DRILLING DECISIONS



In 2012 Pennsylvania passed Act 13, an act which mandated that local governments must allow drilling in all zoning districts and cannot ban or restrict gas development. Act 13 limits local government control and allows only individuals who own land and mineral rights in counties to participate in drilling decisions that will affect their communities.

A report released by the Penn State Center for Economic and Community Development, “Marcellus Shale: Land Ownership, Local Voice, and the Distribution of Lease and Royalty Dollars,” uses Geographic Information System (GIS) data of landownership from eleven-county planning offices (which accounts for 79% of all Pennsylvania Marcellus wells through 2011) to understand community members voices in drilling decisions based on land ownership.

Their results echo a dim reality, where residents have little or no control over local drilling activities in their community.

Based on data collection and analysis, land ownership issues in the 11 counties are as follows:

- Residents do not own land, rather rent from local or non-local owners;
- Residents do not own surface area and mineral rights;
- Land is owned by non-resident parties, public and private.

Furthermore, among land, which is owned by local residents within the 11 counties, distribution of land is highly concentrated in the hands of top 10% of landowners, while the majority of community members own little or no land available for leasing.

Consequently, the majority of county residents suffer from the decisions of non-resident landowners, and from a small percentage of resident landowners.

Economic and social costs associated with drilling include increased health risks, depreciation of property values, and potential water contamination and air pollution issues. Although there are economic benefits to drilling, such as increased employment opportunities, and reportedly \$2.07 billion in lease and royalty payments statewide, it is important to put these benefits into perspective.

Understanding how both developmental benefits and costs are distributed throughout communities, accounting for negative externalities, and ensuring all citizens have a voice in making collective decisions over natural gas development in their communities, should be the priority of Pennsylvania leadership.

Source: <http://www.globalsiteplans.com/environmental-design/communityeconomic-development/pennsylvania-counties-lack-a-voice-in-local-drilling-decisions/>